

James Hoffman

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ROSS

*This interview, edited for brevity, took place on May 21, 2003.
David Ross was artistic director of Western Canada Theatre from 1983-2008.*

JH: So David, if I can ask you first, I am looking for a few basic facts on Western Canada Theatre. What is the amount of the annual budget right now? Ballpark?

DR: One point one million dollars.

JH: Audience size? What's your season number you are playing to?

DR: Oh now, that's a little hard. Generally it's about in the 22,000- 23,000 people per season range.

JH: That's on the main stage at the Sagebrush?

DR: That's both main stage and second stage.

JH: Obviously it changes every year.

DR: Oh yeah.

JH: Can you speak briefly about your audience demographics? Who are you are playing to, generally speaking?

DR: I can certainly tell you about our most typical person. She is a woman, probably a school teacher, between 39 and 43 years of age, and she lives in Sahali. And she has kids and she is pretty effective at dragging her husband to the theatre, although if there's a Blazer playoff game, he'll go there instead and she will bring a friend.

JH: What's the reach? Are you playing to people in Clearwater?

DR: Yes we are. It varies a little bit from year to year. Between seven and ten percent of our audience comes from out of town – some from as far away as Clearwater, 100 Mile House, Ashcroft, and east as well to Salmon Arm and down to Vernon.

JH: What about age range?

DR: Age range? Of course that's something you are always working on. Right now we certainly

have solid audience numbers from 30 to the end.

JH: More adult oriented.

DR: Yes, definitely. But I think we've made some inroads with the 20s to 30s. And at every theatre in Canada, every conference we attend, the question is how to get the 20s in there. In some ways, it is kind of a fact of life. They're out there in the bars, finding their life partners, getting their families started and that kind of thing. We tend to get them after their families have started. And of course we play to student audiences so we're building the next audience as well.

JH: What are the numbers of the ongoing staff here at WCT?

DR: In the summer time when we're not producing, I think we're at seven but in the season when we are producing, there are twenty-five people on staff. That doesn't count the actors, the designers, and the directors.

JH: Are these people employed all winter?

DR: Yes.

JH: How many people are you employing over a year, over a season?

DR: Obviously we use some local actors but over the season maybe twenty five actors from out of town combined with seven or eight in town.

JH: And you're doing five main stage shows of your own?

DR: Yes.

JH: I know it gets complicated with co-pros, and tri-pros, quad-pros?

DR: Well, believe me, people have tried it and it hasn't worked very well.

JH: When does it become touring?

DR: Exactly, that's the union's argument, that it becomes touring after two. A co-pro is a co-pro, but if it's a tri-pro then the actors have to be paid as if they were touring on the third show. And so that becomes part of everybody's joint cost.

JH: You basically look at whatever combinations will get you the good show? So right now, you are looking at five main stage and two to three in the Pavilion?

DR: Now of that two to three, one will always be a touring show. It depends on the year. We create them ourselves, or if something really hot is out there, like *Brilliant* next season, well, we're going to bring that in.

JH: What's your Equity house reading?

DR: We're E at the Sagebrush and F in the Pavilion.

JH: And E is what numbers?

DR: Oh, you mean seating house. You see, it's not counted that way. It's calculated on the basis of your gross potential box office. This past season, E category means your gross potential box office is between 28 and 46 thousand dollars a week and then F is between 14 and 28 thousand a week.

JH: They calculate that on the number of seats?

DR: The number of seats and our ticket pricing and they say that's what we could be selling. We have to say that very few people buy full price tickets. Most of them buy discounted tickets; that's how subscriptions work.

JH: For the Sagebrush, do you count 500 seats or the whole 700?

DR: Well for Equity, we count 480, which is the lower orchestra, that's what keeps us in E.

JH: So strictly speaking, you can't seat in the upper half.

DR: If somebody buys a seat in the lower orchestra and chooses to sit above, we can do that. But we can't sell more than 480 seats to any given show.

JH: Now the particular situation of a professional company, can you just talk briefly on that? You're in a small city. What are the major ways that is different than, say, Vancouver? How is your job different in Kamloops, a small city?

DR: Well, in several really big ways. I guess the biggest possible way is that Glynis [Leyshon] and the [Vancouver] Playhouse sit in the middle of a catchment area of about two and a half million where a lot of artists live: musicians, designers, actors, directors and so on. So the Playhouse's artistic director has people constantly at her door wanting to work in their home town.

In my case, we have resident artists here, some that are Equity and some that are not Equity: emerging artists, people from Three Men of Sin, Saucy Fops, and so on. But for the most part, we bring our artists from out of town; a lot of our designers, some of our directors, and some of our actors come from out of town. So that's probably the biggest difference: we reach further to get our talent.

There are probably still a few people who I wouldn't mind bringing here to work on a show who don't want to leave Vancouver for four or five weeks because there could be a TV audition that they don't want to miss or a film audition. Another really big difference, though, is the impact that we have on the community. In a town this size, everybody on city council knows who you are. I would be surprised if half the people on Vancouver city council even knew the name of the artistic director of the Vancouver Playhouse.

JH: So, WCT has greater impact?

DR: Yes, greater impact on the community. When we choose to do a show, and it's a popular show, 10 percent of the population goes to see that show, whereas in Vancouver, that show would have to run for a year to get 10 percent of the population.

JH: How is Kamloops different from Kelowna and Prince George, which also have professional companies and are small cities? What special factors are there here?

DR: I think a lot of it is history. I think that when Tom Kerr founded this company in the late 60s – initially it was the Western Canada Youth Theatre – he began a tradition. And he established theatre in this city as something that was important.

JH: Some people recall his name. My neighbours say, “Oh yeah, Tom Kerr. I remember his musicals.”

DR: He left in 1976 (over 25 years ago) and people still remember. I’m not trying to claim credit for the success of UCC [TRU]’s theatre department, but there is an ecology of theatre in this town. When you look at Three Men of Sin, Saucy Fops, Six Degrees of Separation and several other companies that have existed over the last few years, a lot of it came out of your theatre department. The schools have good programs here too. It all works together to create a town that cares about theatre. When I go to Kelowna, I watch my colleagues struggle, struggle and struggle!

JH: They’re looking for an AD right now, aren’t they?

DR: They just hired David Mann, who was in Nanaimo, and who is actually an Edmonton artist. David is coming to take over. But at the same time that they hired David, their administrator is leaving to work at the Playhouse in Vancouver. So again, they have a staff of one person who doesn’t live in Kelowna right now.

JH: No history?

DR: They seem not to value it quite as much in Kelowna. I don’t know whether it’s the high seniors population, the tourist climate, or the lake. I don’t know what it is. They just don’t seem to value it, whereas in this town, last week when I went in front of city council to see if they will lend us \$60,000 to put in the ceiling, everybody came up to me and shook hands like I was some sort of visiting relative. And they were falling all over themselves to say, “Yes, what can we do to help? You guys are fabulous!”

Now in Prince George, again, they didn’t have the long history of professional theatre. Basically, Ted [Price] and Anne [Laughlin] just said, “We’re going to do this and we’re using Western Canada Theatre in Kamloops as our model.” And they’ve attempted to do that and they are working very hard and doing a fabulous job. But it took a while. They basically had to say to the city after four years, “You know, we have devoted four years of our lives to this cause and you’re still giving us \$5,000 a year and if you don’t give us \$30,000 a year, we’re walking! And we’re serious! We’re getting in our car and driving out of here.” They’re saying, “Well, don’t leave. We want you. We’ll pay you 30 grand a year.” They’re just way, way behind us in terms of how much the community values them.

JH: I always think of how much Western Canada Theatre has grown from an amateur community theatre, in fact a school group. I think with some professional companies, like those in Prince George and Kelowna, there’s a sense that a professional theatre has been dumped in from the outside, almost. And the people who wanted a company in Kamloops were here, led by a local teacher, Tom Kerr. The growth of the school/ community theatre company into a professional company was very natural.

- DR: And look at the people in that grade 12 class that he started with: Blain Fairman, Ken Smedley, Keith Dinicol, Vicki Weller, Gabrielle Rose. That's an incredible percentage of people [who would go on to national professional careers].
- JH: That is.
- DR: That's an incredible percentage of people. And I've probably missed a couple. And Lanni [Shupe] of course, who's still here.
- JH: How do you characterize the acceptance of Western Canada-- obviously very good?
- DR: I think it's very good.
- JH: Would you say highly exceptional perhaps for a city this size?
- DR: For a city this size, yes. Of course, we've had the opportunity to present it, too. If you took a town of 70,000 or 80,000 in Ontario (mind you there's a lot of success in Ontario in the summer shows) by and large the winter season is edgier work [here] and I think we're doing edgier work than most communities our size that have a theatre.
- JH: Could we talk a little bit about your audience here? What is special and unique about the Kamloops audience, do you think? Obviously that is part of the success.
- DR: I think it's the breadth of the audience. It's the cross section of people that come to the theatre. I think when you compare us again to the Playhouse, Glynis Leyshon knows her audience very well. They're generally older. They're generally more well to do and they're generally more conservative. When she went from the Belfry, there was quite a change for her because the Belfry is probably the audience that every theatre would love to have. They're bright. They're comfortable. They're committed. And they're willing to have edgier material. So she had one of the best theatre companies to work at. Not that the Playhouse has a problem, but it represents a certain section of the community in Vancouver. It's different. And it's different than us. Our secret is that because we are a small community, in order to get the numbers to survive, we appeal to such a broad cross section of people. People don't go to the theatre in large cities to a large extent.
- JH: What's your role as Artist Director? How is it different from AD's in other places? Do you feel that you, as AD here, have a different role in some respects from even Kelowna and Prince George and certainly from the Playhouse?
- DR: With the Playhouse, the artistic director is like me in the sense that she's a director and an actor. She doesn't act as much as I do but she'd like to. She said when she was in *Music Man* she really enjoyed getting on stage and, of course, as you know, she got on stage in our co-production of *The Orphan Muses* almost 10 years ago now. She doesn't do it quite as often as I do but she is really skilled in it that way. And she has a fairly good head for the numbers. I think possibly it's the way you interact with the community. Glynis is under a lot of pressure to interact with the artistic community in Vancouver. She gets people complaining, "You didn't see my show!" But I think that I have to interact at more levels in the community than she probably does. I don't know how many Community Living softball games she goes to, how many AIDS marches she goes to, or how many organic

food auctions she is the auctioneer for. I just reach into the community at many, many different places.

JH: I know all ADs have a kind of formula for creating a season. It used to be the old three C's: the Canadian, the classic oldie, the classic modern. How is your formula driven here by such a small city, by Kamloops? How is your formula special?

DR: Well I don't know because it's not the kind of thing ADs talk about. They don't share that much partly because, I think, the idea of there being a formula, most people think, lessens their creativity. So if they have one, they don't want to talk about it. I'm willing to talk about it but it's not very strict really. I generally like to start with something that is life affirming and fun. Let's get people back into the theatre. Let's take it a little bit easy off the top, you know. Also, we sell some subscriptions in the fall, so let's do something that the people like so much they say, "Let's buy a subscription." Then – this wasn't always the case but I've kind of fallen into a pattern that really works for us – the November/December show has some family appeal. That's the one show in the year where I say, "You can bring your kids to the show. I guarantee it."

JH: *The Hobbit* . . . ?

DR: Yes. And *Anne of Green Gables*, *Peter Pan*, all those kinds of things. We didn't always do that. I remember doing *The Importance of Being Earnest* in that slot. People enjoyed the show, but some came up to me and said, "I'd really like to bring some of my kids just before Christmas." And obviously a show like that is just way too challenging for kids, so that's that.

Then I usually will look upon the January or February show, either or both, as the more challenging shows in the season. This year it's both. *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout* will be very pleasing but still it will challenge a lot of things. And *Coup D'état*, as well, is a play about ideas. On some levels it's Christianity versus Islam. Big topics you know. So I do those in January and February. People seem to be willing in the dark months to be a little more inner looking.

And if I can, I like to finish again on a slightly more excitable note because again we're selling the renewals and that sort of thing. The Pavilion that is where I look to do the edgier stuff. But sometimes obviously the playwright . . . like *Respectable*. I remember you came to me and said, "I feel like I'm in New York. I'm walking into a main stage theatre and I'm seeing a really edgy play." And yeah, for a lot of our audience, it was too edgy.

JH: Yeah, I heard a lot of comments.

DR: I'm sure you did.

JH: "That was swearing!"

DR: "That was swearing!" Yeah. Swearing. It's the biggest puzzle in theatre.

JH: Yes, I know.

DR: And people say, "Well, Shakespeare didn't have to resort to that." I say, "Yes he did. You

just don't recognize them as swear words anymore. "God's blood" and "God's heart" were bad things to say in those days and the characters said them when they needed to. It's just that they don't offend you anymore." The f-word still has frightening power.

JH: I'm getting the impression the formulas don't have a lot to do, perhaps, with the fact it's a small city or that it's Kamloops. What you just said could work in Vancouver and anywhere.

DR: In fact, with Tomson's play, part of the reason that it's not with the tri-pros with the Playhouse and Alberta Theatre Projects is because everybody wants to put it in their most challenging spot. Glynnis said, "I have to do it in January." I said, "Well I don't want to do it in January. Okay then, we'll have to do it in two spots." And Bob said, believe it or not, "Where I put my most challenging piece is October because I already have the new play festival in the spring. So I can't do anything more challenging than that." So he wants October. That's why we have to spread it over two seasons for it to happen.

So I think you're right. Being in Kamloops doesn't make it that much different. Because, honestly, when it comes right down to it, I don't think my audience is that much different than other audiences except for the broadness of it. But other than that, people want to see the same kind of stuff. The people who come to the theatre are people who have an urban mentality that they want to live in a much nicer urban centre. They want to live in Kamloops because you can get everywhere in five minutes and you can be in the bush in 10 minutes.

JH: What is the journey you want to take your audience on? You hear AD's talk about wanting to take their audiences from A to B: starting with a company I want to go here. What's the journey been and what is the journey for you in Kamloops?

DR: I would say the journey for me is that I hope the audience, for the most part, shares my particular seeking. I'm continuously looking for answers, continuously looking for a larger artistic expression, looking to have my values and ideas challenged. I'm that kind of person. I'm hoping the audience shares the same interest in being challenged.

JH: That's fairly general. Is there a particular side to that that applies, say, to Kamloops or even just a small city. I mean, if you were AD'ing in Vancouver, you might be telling me something different perhaps than you are as you are AD'ing in Kamloops. Is there a special journey that Kamloops audiences have to have, or need to or should have, in your view? Where are you taking Kamloops?

DR: Well, I don't think I'm avoiding the question. Going back to what I said earlier, I think, for the most part: people want to live in Kamloops for the benefits of being in a smaller centre, but they don't want to give up any of the amenities. And I'm saying, "Hey, well that's the same reason I'm here." I don't want to live in Vancouver or Toronto. I've been offered jobs there and I don't want to go there. I want to be in a smaller place where I love the quality of life but I don't want to pay any price. I want to have the big city restaurants. I want to have the big city theatre.

JH: In a sense, you want to bring the big city here. I'm trying to think what that means...big city culture to Kamloops. That could mean in a sense some bad things because they have some problems there. That's why we're here.

DR: We're trying to leave the problems behind but still experience the best of what it is to be urbane.

JH: Whatever that means.

DR: Okay. I think that the people in our audience, for the most part, don't want to miss anything. They want to be challenged and entertained in the same way that everybody else does in North America. But they want to live here. So that's my challenge – to make sure they get the best of what's out there. And I think that's our goal. And I try to bring the best artists and the best plays and at far more affordable prices. I know if you go to the theatre in Vancouver on a Saturday night to the Playhouse, you're paying almost \$50 dollars a seat. Here, you're paying \$24, half as much.

JH: You're pretty well locked into, like many Canadian theatre companies in big cities, a typical season of maybe two weeks if you're lucky. Does that bother you at all? For example, you can't have holdovers. You can't have extended runs. You can't go on tour very easily or hardly ever. Do you think that's a problem, being locked in that way?

DR: Well let's separate those questions a little bit because touring is something we could do if we wanted to and in fact we are doing a touring show next year. We're touring *Larger Than Life* and it's going to Vancouver and going through the Fraser Valley. We're going to the Yukon with it and possibly through the Okanagan. And I think it's a show we may well tour for several years in smaller chunks. Just the way the Firehall has toured *Menopositive*. So leave the touring out of it.

Here you've got a hit. The great thing about the Sagebrush is that if a show is a real hit, we have space in that theatre for 6300 seats in a town of 80,000. If necessary, we can sell the upper orchestra and then pay retroactively to everybody involved to meet that Equity scale. I think the big question is, and it is a question a lot of people debate, the subscription season. I don't know if you read *American Theatre Magazine*, that's the theatrical journal that I most look at and it's an American magazine of course and they discuss this a lot. Personally, the subscription season doesn't bother me at all. I have a group of people who are saying, "Hey, we're buying in. We believe in the company. We believe in the vision. We like what we've seen in the past. We think we're going to like it in the future. We'll give you a bunch of money in the spring, six months before you even start on that season." It's the only way we can operate.

Although there was a time when everybody thought subscriptions were dead, and there are places in the states because the population is more dense (say in the New York-Rhode Island area) where you've got four huge regional theatres within an hour's drive of each other. And they are kind of abandoning subscriptions and competing nose-to-nose on every show. It puts a lot of stress on the organization because if people can avoid risk, they generally will. What happens here is we give them the opportunity to not avoid risk and to be pleased by what they see over the course of the season. I always say to people, "I can't guarantee you're going to like every show, absolutely not. But I guarantee you will like most of what's in the season obviously, or otherwise I'm not the right company. So, I don't feel those restrictions. They don't bother me at all. We do nine nights. A lot of the time it's co-pros; it's going somewhere else anyway.

JH: Sure.

DR: So it's not over.

JH: In a sense, touring.

DR: Yeah, that's right. In a sense, it is touring. Well, my particular nature is I'm always ready to move onto the next project anyway. It's heartbreaking sometimes. Shows going down and you know that's it. Gee, we did our ten performances and it's all over. You know it's not that number one. It was a lovely show. We loved it and you know what, in many cases, more than 70 percent of the theatres in the country, we play to more people every night than they do. How often do you play 400 seats a night in Kamloops and then go to one of our co-pros partners and play to 150 a night a run?

JH: And that's a bigger city.

DR: And a bigger city, quite often.

JH: Interesting.

DR: *Larger Than Life* was the hardest one. They went down to the Fire Hall and they were playing to ten to twelve people a night.

JH: I heard that.

DR: After 400 a night up here—because the Firehall has its own set of problems.

JH: It's got its situation.

DR: It's the big city world that we're escaping from. The lower east side. Obviously we have a few heroin addicts but I mean nothing like the lower east side. Donna Spencer is a hero of mine, by the way.

JH: She's got to get a medal for what she's doing . . .

DR: So did I answer that question?

JH: That's fine. One advantage of the big city is you get some pretty good critics. I know in Vancouver you've got Peter Birnie, Colin Thomas, whom you love to hate, etc. And I guess there's others, a lot of professionals around too, artistic people who can give you really good feedback, presumably? If you're an AD, you can call on your friends John Cooper, somebody like that, that kind of thing. Not in Kamloops, perhaps? What's your take on the feedback criticism you get from this town from the artistic community and also from the newspapers or anywhere else? Is it adequate?

DR: We get fairly reasonable criticism from the papers. *The Daily News's* Mike Youds gives intelligent criticism. It's not quite the same, but when you and Ginny write your in-depth pieces for *Grasslands* or our program, that's always useful stuff. There are usually visiting artists who come up for every show. Sometimes they're starting the next one before the last one is over.

Talking to the artistic directors, say in a city like Vancouver where they have Colin Thomas and Peter Birnie, it's not that often that their criticism is useful. The problem is, it's usually the lesser lights. I find Kathleen Oliver Gladstone far more interesting to read than the *Georgia Straight's* Colin Thomas. For one thing, I don't think people should be theatre critics for more than about three years because what happens is they start to love the sound of their own voice, they start to want to live up to their own press, and they start to want to be consistent with what they said two years ago. Peter Birnie, sometimes I agree with him completely; other times I don't agree with him at all.

JH: Kathleen, she's a working playwright and you can respect her. She's fairly new to reviewing. There's a freshness there.

DR: In honesty I feel she's not trying to live up to her reputation. Colin is.

But Kathleen's show right now, I haven't read any criticism on it yet. I dropped into one of the rehearsals and I talked to folks so it's going to be interesting how it turns out. It's like what we used to have when Canada Council officers weren't career positions as they are now. People used to be seconded from the industry for three, four, or five years, then you could get back into the industry. That doesn't happen anymore and I think it's too bad because one day, you're my theatre officer, the next day you're my colleague and you're directing a show here. There is just a sense of responsibility about what you say.

Mike's still in this great position where he's basically saying what he thinks. I don't think his city desk editor is saying, "Mike, you're saying too many nice things. Let's shake things up a little bit." And same thing with Al and the other paper. So criticism, I think, plays less a role in what you're doing than people think. For one reason, you're usually working a year ahead so the criticism is behind you in a sense. And it affects your box office and that's the main thing you care about. Is it going to sell tickets or not sell tickets?

JH: One final question. Where would you like to be in five or ten years with Western Canada Theatre Company in an ideal world, perhaps, in Kamloops?

DR: In an ideal world? I think I would see the Sagebrush continuing to function in the wonderful way it does now, being a strong theatre. I would see the new theatre being well into the planning stages. Perhaps the ground will have even been turned on the new theatre, whatever it's going to be. I would see a new rehearsal hall having been built here so we don't have to rehearse in the Pavilion--so the Pavilion is available to all the other groups in town.

I would see even closer links with the University program than what we have right now. I would see more resident artists who live here. I would see the possibility of more work happening in the summer time, although probably with more of an educational purpose. And I know there's the possibility that we'll do a course with UCC [TRU], with your department, at some point. That's been on the books for a couple of years. We're also looking at upgrading the amount of teaching work that we do ourselves here.

JH: In terms of your role in the community of Kamloops, in five or ten years, will your role change?

DR: My role or the role of the company?

- JH: The role of the company called Western Canadian Theatre. Will it change? Should it change? Ideally how will it be in five or ten years? To become say more vital, more important, whatever, I'm not sure...
- DR: I think we score pretty well in all those areas right now. I think we are, compared to other theatres in the country, pretty vital.
- JH: I guess I'm asking, how could you score more?
- DR: I don't know if I know. I guess I talked about buildings because that's important stuff. How could we score more? I don't know if there's more. Maybe it's not me. In five to ten years, obviously my role will be different from what it is right now. I mean, I'm 58 years old, so gradually what I'm doing right now is dividing responsibilities to other people. I'm not sure what my personal future holds. But I don't see us changing our relationship to this city a lot because I think we're achieving what we want to.
- JH: I'd like to throw a few things at you.
- DR: Yes.
- JH: For example, more theatre perhaps to tell the local story more. Perhaps even get more political: the kind of theatre that really develops controversy and discussion and involves community people more. For example, more experimental theatre, more young people's theatre, perhaps more touring, and even developing children's theatre rather than having them come to see the more-or-less adult shows that are on normally.
- DR: Well let's go through each of them. My philosophy has always been that we have several great touring companies in this province. Green Thumb is one. Carousel is there. Story Theatre is there. Why would we go into their market and destabilize them when they're already doing a fabulous job? I go to most of the shows that come to town (because the actors want me to see them) and I say, "This is great." Why would we do that? It would be like trying to offer 400 level courses and saying, "Don't go to UCC [TRU]; come to us." Why would I do that? Why would I try to destabilize you guys?
- Touring is not our decision, basically. Touring barely exists in Canada and it's all about money. It's all about money. Nobody's in a position to take the huge risks that touring costs. With *Larger Than Life*, with Lori's and Chris's help, we've worked out a way we can do this with minimum risk and so we're doing it. Not that there's anything in it for us but it's a show I don't want to see die and I just think it deserves to be seen by a lot of people. So touring we will do as the opportunities come up.
- As for edgier work, I think we're pushing the envelope as far as we can to the degree that we are. You know, 24,000 people are not going to come to us if we're doing *Unidentified Human Remains*. That's why we do what we can to support Three Men of Sin, to support Saucy Fops, to support Gala, to support Six Degrees of Separation: because those are the companies that should be doing that work. Not us. We're the mainstage company in this area.
- We've always developed new work and we'll continue to do it and Tomson's play is an example. Local stories, you know, if a local story is there, bring it to me. The stories that

we've tended to do? Obviously we did *Boris Karloff Slept Here* a number of years ago and Ginny Ratsoy wants to look at the script which is scaring me to death because I don't think we ever really finished assembling the script. I think I will be giving her my director's workings.

JH: There is no script.

DR: Not really. I can always show her the video tape. The local stories: *The MacLean Boys*, a huge play, did really well; with the Phil Gaglardi story [*Flyin' Phil*] we did really well. If there's another story, I want to do it but I don't know what the story is. You tell me anytime you see a story, give it to me and if I think it can work, I'll find a writer and we can develop it. And of course that's what we are doing with Tomson's play. We saw the history of the relationship, from the white contact of 1910, as being an essential part of the story that hasn't been told. But these plays take time. We've been two years working on that one. It'll be three years by the time we do it. So if you're just throwing them out one after another, you're just going to confuse the audience. It's going to be too much.

The last thing that's helpful to Canadian theatre is to put on an American play that looks great and then follow it with an underdeveloped local play that looks bad. So it's all carefully approached as to how we're going to develop it.

What did I miss? We experiment with form a little bit but again it's the nature of the audience I think. Maybe my skills are more in the area of challenging new ideas as opposed to form. Again, I would support whoever wants to experiment with form; we will see what we can do to help. If there's ever a show that you see and you say, "I think you should be doing this show," I'll definitely look at it and see if we can swing it.

But all those areas, I think, I'm aware of, and we have a reason for what we're doing. It's not that we're hiding from anything; it's just, what are we? What kind of a company, what kind of a group of people are we? What is the nature of our audience? What is the nature of our facilities? What's the nature of our funding and our corporate support? All these things have to coalesce to make it work.